



'Things that matter'

Posted on 2 September 2011

We statisticians can sometimes be caught up in our own world and lingo, making the assumption that others know what we're talking about. And when it comes to talking about progress, we can still make that mistake (even though it's a more 'sexy' topic than things like Input-Output tables - sorry to those who work in Input and Output).

So to clarify things - the aim of our consultation basically boils down to one fundamental point - **'Things that Matter'**. We want to know what matters to Australians so we can better measure our progress towards those.

So tell us what matters to you.

Serhat

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Comments

#1 Martin Jones

2/09/2011 5:27:32 PM 'Things that matter'

Things that matter (in no particular order):

Incomes

Lifespan

Health (physical and mental)

Free time

Productivity

Crime (Safety)

Social connections (friendship, trust of community)

Social Mobility

Environmental Quality (!)

Sustainability (Brundtland definition)

Equality (of the above things among socio-economic groups; men/women, urban/regional, ethnic groups, etc)

#2 Jules

2/09/2011 8:40:59 PM 'Things that matter'

For me the number of people in public education matter. My grandparents didn't finish primary school, my parents didn't finish high school and I had the opportunity to go to university. It changed my life. It wasn't that I was smarter, it was because the access was better. I think if the numbers in public schools goes backwards than access to education will go backwards.

The gap between amount of money paid to single parent payment/newstart and aged pension. All vulnerable people should be paid the same if they are to live and participate in society. It demonstrates meanness if not so. I don't want to live in a mean society.

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Gap in income of poorest and richest should be reducing.

growth in social housing dwellings.

Frank and fearless public servants

Those on government benefits treated with respect - after more than 10 years of working with people living with disadvantage - this is what they told me was most important to them.

'Someone to love, something to do'

These are some of the things that matter to me!

#3 JA

2/09/2011 8:41:50 PM 'Things that matter'

Growth in overseas aid

#4 David Goh

5/09/2011 9:57:41 AM 'Things that matter'

sexuality, secularism/atheism, happiness, social equity, food availability and choice, leisure activity availability and choice.

#5 Sarah

5/09/2011 10:21:46 AM 'Things that matter'

What matters to me is the way in which we treat our environment. I believe that most Australians have no idea of how valuable our environment really is. To most people, looking after the environment seems to be a bit like eating more vegetables or doing exercise- we know that we should, but.... Either it's a touchy-feely thing that we don't really care about that much, or we know it's important but there's always something else more pressing that makes us put it on the backburner.

The fact of the matter is that how we treat the environment affects everything else that we hold dear. Cutting down a forest or losing of a species of small mammal that you have never heard about may not appear to have anything to do with your everyday life, but in the end it's all linked. Our environment, our ecosystem, our world is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Progress to me, would be the recognition of this in every decision that we make. Recognition that polluting the earth or killing species is ultimately linked to our ability to access clean water, eat good food and breathe clean air, be free from illness, provide warm, safe homes for ourselves and our loved ones, get a good education and a good job.

#6 Cathy

5/09/2011 4:04:15 PM 'Things that matter'

Things that matter in measuring progress include (in no particular order):

Improving how we treat the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our society (for example, aboriginal Australians, people with disabilities, long-term illness or drug dependencies, children who've been abused, asylum seekers, the homeless)

Reducing social and economic inequality - UN data on the gap between incomes of the top 10% and bottom 10% by country shows that Australia is a very unequal society (more so than many other countries)

Reducing excessive work hours for some and increasing work opportunities for the unemployed and under-employed

Reducing our environmental impact - Australians are very damaging to the environment per capita, relative to other developed countries (eg our high carbon emission rates)

Improving social connectedness and parenting and relationship skills

Strengthening our democratic system - eg cleaning up political donation systems to reduce the power of wealthy corporations to influence government decisions

Making our government truly secular - for example, teaching comparative religion and philosophy in schools, not Christianity only; permitting gay marriage

#7 christine

5/09/2011 4:15:55 PM 'Things that matter'

being connected to humanity

valuing those who truly contribute to our community - child care workers, nurses, aged care workers (it is no coincidence that those working with the most vulnerable and powerless are paid the least. Why should someone who fixes computers be paid 4 times more an hour than someone who cares for children and old people???)

equity between haves and have nots

children - lets embrace them in our communities - it takes a village to raise a child

pick up someone else's litter - the world belongs to you

#8 bart

6/09/2011 9:53:00 AM 'Things that matter'

While I generally agree with the 'things' already mentioned I'd have to say my biggest concern at present is the appalling quality of governance shown by state and commonwealth governments at present. Mind you I also think the coverage of government by the media is also more about sensationalism than about objective reporting.

It 'matters' to me that respect for the process of governing is being undermined by governments (and opposition) management of current issues. the constant sniping, infighting and apparent dishonesty shown by our elected representatives is a sad indictment on the quality of candidate or the party politics they subsequently become embroiled in.

This country needs leadership and government that is respected. That matters.

#9 peter crawford

6/09/2011 2:18:13 PM 'Things that matter'

the things that matter are stable population, treating the environment with absolute responsibility and having a sense of the worthy aspects of our own culture and history. Reject people smuggling, and population increase policies. Stop the bleeding heart policies of the churches and the greens favouring uncontrolled illegal immigration by boat and plane while demonstrating indifference to the poor of the earth who have no access to people smuggling rackets.

#10 Lynne Smith

8/09/2011 10:22:28 AM 'Things that matter'

Yes, much contained in the above posts matter; but we won't be able to enjoy anything unless we protect our food supply. Dick Smith made some progress on this issue, but lately we hear little of it. Apparently China has warned us not to blindly trust in the continuation of our resources boom for the future. This is wise, we not only fail to preserve and protect our food production but we also neglect to recognise and promote other industries at which we excel, for example computer game developers, science (CSIRO) and education, where we may already have lost much ground due to the blindness of policy makers. However, as said, nothing is as important as FOOD! Without protection we are utterly vulnerable.

#11 Alice Taylor

12/09/2011 9:12:39 PM 'Things that matter'

The idea of increasing population growth to fuel economic growth ignores the natural limits of the environment in which we live. We need to first acknowledge then implement change to adapt more sustainable methods of energy production, food production and renewable based infrastructure (solar and wind). To do this, we need to better educate people that they can make a difference and by taking a community based approach to solving environmental issues. Because without a healthy environment, how can we prosper for years to come? So the health of, and attitudes towards, our environment are huge measures of Australia's progress.

We should also put more value on social capital - the ways people of all ages can contribute to making society better. We could start by looking outwards for the needs of others instead of focusing on just ourselves as individuals. I believe that a happier nation, is one where people look out for each other and have strong connections to ensure they are

more resilient.

#12 Sophie Linehan

12/09/2011 9:59:47 PM 'Things that matter'

Sustainable land management and sustainable food production

- Since the beginning of European land management the amount of degradation and ecosystem collapse across the country has been significant. Resulting in dry-land salinity, erosion and infertility etc. Large areas in the Australian landscape have suffered from poor short-term focused land management methods and there is a need to adapt more sustainable methods of agriculture to sustain food production for the population without causing irreversible damage to our resources.

Value for food

- People are very disconnected with where their food comes from. Half the food we produce gets wasted. When bought in packets from a supermarket people do not understand the production processes and see food as a right, not a privilege. We do not earn our food, therefore we do not respect it. We need to develop an appreciation from where food comes and the processes involved, and the understanding that as consumers, we drive the food market.

Population growth

- The focus on development and growth is a scary prospect for a country that is currently buckling under the pressure of the current population. Focusing on filling something without considering the limits to how much or the boundaries with which it goes, is blind. It seems ridiculous not to consider what limits we have when we already stretching them.

Climate change

- Opposition to climate change is a social denial. People do not react lightly to being told that everything they value and the decisions they have made are wrong and should be taken away from them. In fact, they will work towards justifying them more so. There is no need to argue the point of climate change, but the need for society to acknowledge their mistakes, and get on with it.

Social well-being

- Society is influenced, especially by the media, to be inwardly focused. This makes people feel detached from their role in society and communities. This results in isolation and social dysfunction. We need to initiate social integration, of all ages, and inclusiveness.

Mental health

- Society focuses a lot on physical health without acknowledging the need for mental health support, it is widely seen as a weakness to suffer from mental health issues, and this creates a divide between the cause and treatment of it.

Body image - beauty myth

- I can't think of one person that isn't affected by their body image, and made to feel worse about themselves because of how they look, or get distracted from important aspects of their lives because of it. The beauty myth surrounds the notion that models and the images the popular media projects is an unnatural state, for women especially to be in. Respect and understanding of what is healthy needs to happen to help people with eating disorders and self happiness.

Education

- All of this can be helped by further education. People are being sold short and not being involved in information that can help implement many of these significant issues. More inclusion and education of these issues, the cause and extents of the problems, possible solutions and integration for more thought should be available to everyone.

Ridding racism - a need for tolerance and acceptance

- The notion that boat people or illegal immigrants do not belong in Australia is utterly ridiculous. We are all immigrants that arrived on boats and people need to acknowledge that there should be equal opportunity for people, especially those fleeing a country or society in distress. They are an insignificant percentage of the amount of Australians that

immigrate to Australia every year.

Sorry for the rant, I study environmental science and have a lot on my mind. Good luck to us all!! =)

#13 Andy Moore

14/09/2011 12:31:02 AM 'Things that matter'

'Things that matter' - nice post Sophie...

One of the things that matter in real terms is how many community organisations there are in a given area. Studies show that 'macro' wellbeing is directly linked to the existence and participation in 'community clubs'.

How many sports clubs, art groups, scout/guides groups, neighborhood watch, craft groups, environment groups, birdwatching, bushwalking, computer clubs, NGOs etc etc etc... Are there in a postcode?

What is the per capita participation rate for a statistical area?

How do these groups rate on a sustainability index? I.e. Financial, support, attrition, demographics, growth...

#14 Caitlin

15/09/2011 9:24:22 AM 'Things that matter'

- Environmental conservation/protection

- Sustainable development/sustainable living

- Human rights, globally (education, healthcare, equality; civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights)

- Happiness (measured by population mental and physical health and wellbeing and living conditions, and subjective and objective perspectives on happiness).

#15 Communitst

15/09/2011 10:50:06 AM 'Things that matter'

Things that matter that can be measured by the ABS:

Life expectancy (years)

Energy security (kWh p.a. from renewable sources)

Water security (number of years that dam capacity will last (reduce annual consumption - dont build more dams!))

Overseas Aid (\$)

Average hours spent volunteering/community work (hours/week)

Total waste to landfill (tonnes AND cubic meters p.a.)

#16 Ken

16/09/2011 2:53:10 PM 'Things that matter'

hmm just off the top of my head, things that matter to me right now:

*healthy networks of friends, family and colleagues

*safe communities and the ability to feel secure at home and in public

*community diversity and harmony

*Freedom of expression for one's own ideas

*Meaningful work and a healthy (mind, body and soul) work-life balance

*Mental health (services, education, support etc.)

*Access to education/training

*Equity among all Australians (regardless of where they live) with indicators like education, access to social services, etc...

- *Access to high-speed internet
- *Affordable accommodation
- *Real environmental sustainability (not just phoney measures or smokescreens)
- *Tobacco, alcohol and other drug abuse and their impacts on people and communities
- *Travel, both within Australia and overseas
- *Embracing Indigenous cultures and having a two-way learning process between different cultures.
- *Spirituality (different from 'religion') and the freedom to pursue such thinking
- *happiness and fulfillment in life.
- *Greenspaces and nature (incl. biodiversity protection)

OK, seems like I had a lot on my mind. thanks for reading!

Ken, suburban Adelaide, Aged 29.

#17 Dr Robyn Eversole

20/10/2011 11:56:13 AM 'Things that matter'

Different things matter to different people, though there are clearly some themes coming through in the above.

One thing I find very important is freedom.

Observing Australian society over the last ten years, I have seen progressively less freedom - and growing 'social control'.

The reliance on rules, regulations and other top-down mandates grows, while flexibility, innovation and 'room to move' decreases accordingly.

I wrote a bit about this in a recent issue of the Journal of Public Policy, in the context of the bureaucratisation of community action. But the issue is much bigger. Reading the Opinion section of the newspapers, I am repeatedly struck by the social attitude 'I don't like people doing this - pass a law against it.', or the inverse: 'People should be made to do this.'

Twenty years as a social scientist living across many different societies has taught me that people do not typically know what is good for other people. There is too much complexity and context involved. Equally, tolerance of diversity makes for much happier societies than enforced conformity. And if growing productivity and jobs are goals - then diversity and room to move are needed for the innovations that make this possible.

Is Australia becoming less free? Freedom matters.

#18 DavidM

30/10/2011 3:51:24 PM 'Things that matter'

Thanks Serhat , We often do not realise how much it matters until we do not have it any more, but what really matters is that we can know what things matter and measure and account for them. It is good to have the ABS with such an attitude, and I am sure good will come of it, this matters.

#19 DavidM

30/10/2011 3:51:36 PM 'Things that matter'

Thanks Serhat , We often do not realise how much it matters until we do not have it any more, but what really matters is that we can know what things matter and measure and account for them. It is good to have the ABS with such an attitude, and I am sure good will come of it, this matters.

#20 Michael H

2/11/2011 12:55:41 PM 'Things that matter'

Overall measure: where is the wealth going?

Ratio of executive salaries to median worker salary

The recent Qantas dispute has brought into spotlight a comparison of Australian wages

versus those for overseas workers. Boards are putting downward pressure on salaries to compete on the international scene but the clear trend is for their salaries to rise. Without subjectivity this trend needs to be analysed for commentators to be able to address questions of equity in our country.

Wage - Profit ratios

Are wage levels or company profits a better indicator of the health of our economy? If profit levels are rising in relation to wage levels then what does this tell us.

Wages as a percentage of individual income by income decile.

If wages are declining due to international pressure then to maintain current levels of wealth Australians will need to find wealth from other sources. Shareholding dividends are one of the options. This measure will tell us whether dividends are helping to fill the gap or if they are just exacerbating the current trend towards polarity in income distribution.

Shareholdings as a percentage of individual net worth

Over time if income moves from wage to share-based income, presumably some wealth will be locked up in shares. Will Australian wealth patterns shift from the high proportion of wealth contained in private dwellings.

Satisfaction in the workplace

It is very hard to believe that an increasingly casualised workforce could be as happy as one that offers better conditions. For example the casualised labour force at public schools have their contracts concluded prior to the end of the year holidays then renewed afterwards to there is no holiday pay. What do they live on for that time, especially with Christmas in the middle?

Measurement becomes problematic as many Gen Y workers would not be aware that better conditions once existed in places like the retail sector.

#21 Jennifer J

3/11/2011 10:02:35 PM 'Things that matter'

Increasing individualism across public policy responses to the cost of social structures.

The hidden social cost of the rapid rise of women in the workforce over the past 10 years and the concomitant marketisation of parenthood.

The casualisation of the workforce.

What matters is our relationships and our environment and the extent to which these things motivate us. Our altruism, compassion, community spirit, commitment to public service. What needs to be measured is the things that can't be measured! They make us and they make our society.

#22 Marco

5/11/2011 8:44:33 AM 'Things that matter'

I support most of the previous submissions relating to incomes and I would like to add wealth.

Frankly, the data currently made available is unsatisfactory: it's irregularly released and when it's released, it's delayed, and on top it's not fully comparable over time.

So, this is my wish list: improved, more frequent and abundant income/wealth data. The current quintile aggregation level is too coarse: data should be released at a finer level: say, decile.

For me, ideally, income and wealth data would be released at percentile level, so as to compare with the latest ATO taxable income data.

Further, I don't believe the equivalised income data is calculated the same manner done by the other OECD countries and we have no indication whatsoever about capital gains.

Finally, I would like the lowest income decile data to be made available, even though I understand that there are reservations about its reliability.

#23 Gary

7/11/2011 5:37:35 PM 'Things that matter'

We need to balance population with sustainable food production. no longer should we be allowed to have as many children as we like, citing freedom of choice. We need to put some community rights (humanity) above personal rights if we are to continue on this planet. We have just reached 7 billion people how much longer can the earth sustain such growth. Not only do we have to provide food for all these people but we have to accelerate our use of other resources such as minerals and water and these all add to our production of wastes which compounds the problems. We must curb these cycles before it's too late.

#24 iol....

13/12/2011 8:31:35 PM 'Things that matter'

There are a lot of things that matter, but there's one significant thing that matters the most to me

You say on the website (sorry - link too long to bother posting)

"The wellbeing of society depends not only on the wellbeing of individual citizens, but also on the quality of our collective public life: on factors such as the fairness of our political system, the health of our democracy and the participation of citizens in public life."

Democracy.

So wouldn't you think that if over 80% of Australians supported something that this would be made into law?

Over 80% of Australian support the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia yet parliament continues to reject legislation. About 70% of Australians support gay marriage yet some states still haven't legislated to approve it.

The politicians are influenced by religious groups and this is seriously eroding into the democratic process.

And we pride ourselves in being a liberal country. Try telling that to someone dying of terminal cancer suffering indignities and untreatable pain.

#25 Jerry

20/01/2012 2:55:15 PM 'Things that matter'

Creativity, innovation, art, passion, compassion, empathy, and love are what floats my boat.

Democracy, science, food security, material comfort, better public transport, equity, employment, sustainability etc. are all important. However, our core values need attention before the social and physical infrastructure will serve anything beyond self interest.

#26 Sam Bail

25/01/2012 11:53:57 AM 'Things that matter'

1. National Wealth & Income span - i.e. the range between lowest and highest worths/incomes. Progress (target) would be defined as the minimisation of the range = a more equal society in terms of material income (and existing wealth).

2. Some sort of happiness measure or range of measures (empirically derived). Particularly around close and family relationships. Specifically, a measure of the degree to which fathers are able to spend time with their children (relates to family court decisions and work/life balance, commuting times which relate to social equity [poor people have to spend longer on travel due to having to live on the outskirts of town]).

3. Democracy. Progress = the degree to which decision making is shared by all in society, especially young, old, women and minority groups. Democracy progress needs to be measured in the main areas of life; politics, finance, industry, welfare. Progress = more power is given to more people in making their own decisions on matters that affect them (as opposed to decisions being made for them by politicians and bosses). Thus, progress = direct democracy as opposed to totalitarian private enterprise and parliament decision making = anarcho-syndicalism = anarchism.

4. Degree to which material consumption is reduced (reduction in energy consumption). A measure of economic prosperity that is not predicated on growth. I.e. growth = BAD! Contraction = good (without poverty, suffering, joblessness and death however)

5. Government spending on social need. Progress = greater percentage of GDP(?) spent on education, health, infrastructure, pensions, etc. (but not military spending!)

6. Diversity of business. Progress = less monopolies, especially by corporations, especially in the media.

7. Higher corporation and high income earner tax. Progress = range of tax rates where greater range is better. Also relates to point 1 above.

8. International aid - progress = greater percentage of GDP spend on overseas aid, including help to refugees, especially here in Australia, including support for those seeking refugee in Australia by non official means (and I don't mean building detention centres, but shutting them down and supporting people in the community). Relates to point 5

9. An empirical measure of inflation that has not been doctored by politicians specifically to hide from people how much they are getting screwed, as the current CPI does. This has been done to facilitate the decline in real wage rates (purchasing power) as wage bargaining is linked to CPI. CPI intentionally does not reflect changes in the cost of living (e.g. excludes rent and mortgage pays, most people's biggest living expense). Progress = statistics free from political manipulation / lying.

#27 Karl Fitzgerald

26/01/2012 8:19:55 AM Real Estate statistics

1. More timely land valuations - ensure all valuer generals release their data more rapidly like S.A (one month after valuation) versus Victoria's 18 months.

2. ABS taking control of house sales data (and thus house prices) rather than private providers with suspect sampling.

3. Please can we have some accurate housing vacancy statistics that includes the entire land and housing market, rather than the subset we are spoon fed by the property lobby promoting vacancy as only those properties on the rental market. With speculation playing such a dominant role, we need to include land banking and home hoarding. Using water consumption as a proxy could be a good start.

4. Unemployment - 1 hour per fortnight is considered employed - cmon - who are you kidding!

5. CPI - ensure the weighting of the land component is improved. Why do we talk of house price appreciation when houses depreciate and land appreciates?

#28 Bryan Kavanagh

26/01/2012 9:34:08 AM 'Things that matter'

The extent of land and natural resource rent in the economy is most important data. These are unearned incomes in that they are community generated. Former senior Treasury analyst Dr Terry Dwyer started the ball rolling with "The Taxable Capacity of Australian Land and Resources" in Australian Tax Forum Vol 18 No.1, 2003, and I updated Australia's land rent in graphical format at { [Link](#) }

Regards,

#29 Karl Williams

26/01/2012 11:27:00 AM 'Things that matter'

With our economy being periodically lurching into boom-bust cycles driven by bursting property (land, really) prices, surely the ABS needs to collect a whole range of property stats - e.g. residential and commercial sales volume, prices. The important breakdown between land and improvements needs to be made. Without the ABS collecting this and many more stats on land, we're left to the vested interests of the real estate bodies and the Property Council of Aust. to inform us!

#30 David Pereira

26/01/2012 3:22:14 PM 'Things that matter'

My one and only thought is Immigration - focus on the real issues

There currently sits the thought that the real issue when it comes to immigration is the queue jumpers (refugees). The 3500 that come by boat is nothing compared to the 150,000 that come by plane, over stay their working visa's and defraud the system. The belief that refugees are the issue when it comes to immigration needs to be changed.

David Pereira

#31 David Spain

27/01/2012 9:43:56 AM 'Things that matter'

A range of natural resources, not made by humanity but given by Creation, are at present privatized by force of law. Often the price or rental paid is way below market value. Yet it is the presence & demand of the community which makes these assets valuable and pumps up resale price. Here is a proper source of public revenue which is largely ignored because "rent-seekers", wanting something for nothing, have distorted governmental processes.

Statistics should be kept as regards each of these types of asset and the revenue collected as opposed to the market value. Indicative types are:

- Freehold land
- Crown leasehold
- Crown Pastoral Leases
- Footpath licenses
- .. Boat moorings
- Radio, TV, telephone etc. wavelength spectra
- satellite orbits especially geostationary
- mining leases, with division into types especially coal, iron ore & gold
- Crown timber coupes
- Fishing quotas & licenses

#32 William Young

6/02/2012 10:18:45 PM 'Things that matter'

Some comments from parliamentarian Andrew Leigh here: { [Link](#) }

#33 Jamie Parsons

12/02/2012 12:15:58 AM 'Things that matter'

The quality of education as reflected by the state of mind of people when they are within the school system and after they have left it.

For me this is the key to achieving many of the changes that people want to see (as mentioned above). The way that we educate our children and guide them through their formative years determines the types of people that we have in our society. From my own experience, education in Australia could be greatly improved by focussing on the personal development of the child/young adult and the developing of social competencies including understanding themselves and how to communicate with others.

If our education focussed more on such things rather than producing people who can add to GDP and make more money for the already-wealthy, then I believe those things that people believe matter would be that much easier to achieve.

#34 Peter Khawaja

8/03/2012 9:49:30 AM 'Things that matter'

Increasing productivity whilst reducing pollution and [depletion of] natural resources could extremely benefit our future generations whilst being beneficial to strong economic and sustainable growth.

#35 Gary Goland

25/04/2012 11:01:55 PM 'Things that matter'

I and others I communicate with in the community, have a strong reference to what values exist for the quality of our living and working environments, and how that relates to public health incidence. I take that connection one step further and ask what is the cost of maintaining the lack of any reference connection between the quality of living and working environments, by simply ignoring the presence of noise and fumes? The railway station in Adelaide is example of a combination of this situation. Staff there are in it all day. I look to Health Mapping by Prof John Glover's group at Adelaide University, and see statistics for disease is elevated in areas that are close to industry. Yet I cannot find on line at any government resource, including EPA, any LOCAL measures for air quality, noise or ground

water contamination in these areas. I am aware that Access Economics did an analysis of the cost of just hearing loss in 2005-6, and came back with the figure of 11.75 Billion dollars in direct costs, and a further 11.3 Billion dollars in health related issues. 37% of this attributed to unwanted noise. When will we have some local measures to relate to risk levels in the general population, and when will account be taken for situations containing vulnerability, such as hospitals, aged care facilities and schools. Planners have no data to consider placement, and no data is available to track changes occurring as things like population and vehicle numbers increase. Not that they have any responsibility for those changes. Our Government does.

Subject:

'Things that matter'

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